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ABSTRACT

This guide to teaching composition through fieldwork is the result of research on student writing similar to Eliot Wigginton's "Foxfire" magazine and other regional products. Following a review of the literature, a step-by-step guide to gathering support from both the school administration and the community for a fieldwork writing project is outlined, along with suggestions for evaluating the student writing that results from such a project. Lesson plans are presented for several writing projects at the elementary and secondary levels, and a sample interview technique is suggested. (AEA)

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A GUIDE TO USING THE FIELD WORK TECHNIQUE

TO TEACH WRITING

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WISCONSIN WRITING PROJECT 1979

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Table of Contents

I. Philosophy 1

II. Definition 3

III. An Overview of the Research 5

IV. How to Communicate Your Ideas to Others. 9

V. Evaluation of Fieldwork. 13

VI. Strategies
- Elementary 15
- Middle School. 25
- High School 39

VII. Bibliography 49

VIII. Appendix: Interview Technique 51

Philosophy

Because we believe that writing is the most complex use of language and extends upon and reinforces all communication and critical thinking skills, we want our students to write as much as possible--to write because they have something important to say, based on their own discoveries, and someone important to write it for--an interested audience. We believe the fieldwork technique is the best way to accomplish this goal. Carefully planned and well organized study which uses the students' community itself as raw material and audience motivates writing that is fresh and original, not the digestion of the Encyclopedia Brittanica some teachers complain they receive. In the process of doing fieldwork, students experience their own community first hand, and when they compose this experience on paper, they gain a sense of their own relationship to their surroundings, an identity, and a sense of responsibility. We agree that implementing fieldwork and the resulting writing projects is not a simple task--it takes time, energy and resources. We also know the resultant learning and written work make the challenge of this kind of teaching worth exploring at every grade level and in every content area.

> ...the kids in the area are the only ones who <u>should</u> be allowed to collect this information. They're the ones to whom it will eventually mean the most. It's their birthright, their legacy, and <u>they</u>--not strangers from the outside--should be the ultimate beneficiaries of whatever good results the project yields.
>
> Eliot Wigginton, <u>Foxfire</u>, Book One

1

Definition

The Fieldwork Approach to writing is . . .

--a first hand experience to motivate students to want to write

--many options to keep students interested in writing

--an opportunity to individualize writing

--a time to do primary research and write original material

--information gathered using all of the senses

--a reason to question, write, revise, and rewrite

--a written product prepared for a specific audience

--an opportunity to use skills learned in the classroom in real life situations

--allowing students to see the importance of learning outside the classroom

--an opportunity to work co-operatively on a group project

--an on-going process of developing human relationships

--interaction between the student and his community

--an opportunity to discover their own role in the community

--an appreciation of people and places in the community

The Fieldwork Approach to writing is not . . .

--an end in itself

--an excuse to get out of the classroom

--something than can be done hastily

--unstructured

--just a field trip

An Overview of the Research

Using the fieldwork or field investigation technique to teach composition is an idea whose time had definitely come. Regional versions of Eliot Wigginton's Foxfire magazine are cropping up all over the country, especially in areas where there is low student motivation to finish school or even attend regularly. These student written publications, based on locally collected information, have experienced such educational and financial success that even those skeptics inclined to label fieldwork as "overstimulating" are forced to reconsider what students feel is important to write about and what, therefore, stimulates them to produce work that is exciting, refreshing and original.[1]

James Moffett, in his Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13, agrees that "the invitation to put fresh experiences into words " seems to bring students "back to life."[2]

> Never having climbed very high on the abstraction ladder, unmotivated to write about books and remote topics, they like to observe, live close to concrete things, and can find some pleasure in verbalizing these things. Once interested, they can consider the conceptual and technical matters of shaping their material through revision.[3]

Moffett suggests beginning fieldwork technique by having students make "observational visits" and write about places they are familiar with, e.g., where a student works, goes to church, ("A place has its own primitive kind of unity, the organic interrelationships of its

sounds and sights") and then do interviews, where the subject is more abstract and secondhand and the person becomes as important as the place.[4]

Pamela Wood has written a book called You and Aunt Arie to be used as a guide for getting students involved in Foxfire-type fieldwork experiences. She feels that doing cultural journalism develops students' skills in interviewing, writing, composing, and editing. She discusses photography, layout and publication strategies as well. Time inside the school classroom is spent interpreting and polishing what they've collected outside.[5]

Perhaps the most exciting result of using a fieldwork approach to teach writing is the students' own understanding of how their community works. Wigginton says that "we are giving some of the kids in this area a far richer educational experience than they would ever have received otherwise. They are beginning to understand their families, their community, and themselves as they would never have understood those things before."[6] Leon Westbrock took his high school students to nursing homes, centers for mentally retarded children and adults and elementary schools to get them communicating with people other than their own peers and write about their reactions to the experience of aging. The results were positive. Even students who had barely written before wrote pages of reactions in their final paper. As one student said:

> I learned a lot from this experience and I am glad I had the chance because not every school has the opportunity to learn this. It was well worth the time. A lot of things I forget will be things I learnt in school, but I'll never forget this one and I'll always be able to use it.[7]

Such results are not happening just at the secondary level. K-6th graders are putting out a community services directory in Andover, Massachusetts; an elementary school in British Columbia puts out the only newspaper in the community, supports itself with advertising, and pays students wages; and 5th graders in Oregon pay weekly visits to people in a local nursing home and write about these experiences.[8]

When combined and written up at length into group projects, fieldwork reports "provide a very powerful kind of firsthand research that not only should reflect the student's private interest--there are people and places for all interests--but should also relate to . . . work in other subjects,"[9] thus making fieldwork technique an ideal vehicle for interdisciplinary teaching and writing in the content areas. After students have been out in the community, they can put themselves into writing that has real validity and worth and be guaranteed that the writing will be read by an audience that cares.[10]

Footnotes

1. Pamela Wood, You & Aunt Arie, (Star Press Maine 1975) p. 6

2. James Moffett, A Student Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Houghton Mifflin, 1973 p.414.

3. Moffett, p. 414.

4. Moffett, p. 419.

5. Pamela Wood, p. 4.

6. Eliot Wigginton, reprinted in English Teacher's Companion, editor Scholastic Book Services, 1974, p. 109.

7. Leon Westbrock, "Input: A Communication Experience on Aging," English Teacher's Companion, Scholastic Book Service, 1975, p. 138.

8. Lois Hoslan et al, "These Kids Perform Community Service," Instructor, January 1978, p. 58.

9. Moffett, p. 429.

10. Robert C. & Isabel L. Hawley, Writing For the Fun of It, ERA Amherst, Ma 1974, p. V.

How to Communicate Your Ideas to Others

Now that we've convinced you of the virtues of field work, your next step is to get the support of your principal and the community.

Your principal

We're sure that a clear, concise explanation of the facts will gain you your principal's support. Here are some things to do:

1. Show your principal this book. The numerous examples we present in this book should persuade him or her that field work is a tried and proven technique. Also, the different strategies we develop provide good models for organization.
2. Show your principal journal articles on specific projects. Our bibliography gives you plenty of sources for specific projects in case he or she wants to make an in-depth study of one of the successful field work techniques.
3. Impress your principal with your organization. Be specific, not vague, in discussing your plans. Have as much as possible thought out before you even go into his or her office, so that you can respond intelligently to any question he or she may ask.
4. Emphasize the public relations opportunity of a project like this. So often principals and schools are called upon to react to community concerns. Here you have a chance to act, showing the community you teach in that you feel it is a valuable educational resource.

5. Mention that the money needed would be negligible. Many of the most successful field work projects (e.g., Foxfire) used no school funds at all. Some of the suggestions in this book may require the renting of a bus, but that would be the chief expense.
6. Stress the fact that this is not a typical field trip. Emphasize that the time spent on this project is all directly related to your discipline and not solely on enrichment activity.

Your community

You could give your students a successful fieldwork esperience with very few people in the community realizing it had taken place, but sharing your actions with the community at large can bring forward unexpected help and moral support. Here are some people to contact:

1. The local newspaper. Most local newspapers are crying for something new to write about their schools. Whether you realize it or not, your project is newsworthy.
2. The local librarian, historical society, or archivist. These people also have a vested interest in the community and share with you the assumption that field work is predicated upon: your community and what happens in it is important.
3. The local chamber of commerce. What's good for the community is good for its local businessmen. Let them know what you're doing, and you might gain some financial, besides moral, support.

4. Local institutions. When your project's done, share it with the community. Local hospitals, nursing homes, churches, and other schools provide great opportunities for disseminating your work.

Evaluation of Fieldwork

Since writing from field work is often public, it is the audience that ultimately evaluates the writing. Students know that their work will be for others to read. They are eager to do a fine job because their writing activities usually mean something to them. The teacher becomes an aid in the process of getting articles ready for publication, not the final judge.

The teacher may want to record individual growth in writing skills. A checklist is a good way for the student and teacher to see progress. Since each fieldwork project is unique, the teacher will need to develop a particular group of skills for that project. This list of skills should be made before the project begins so that the teacher can make his or her students aware of the writing objectives and provide opportunities to teach them.

Fieldwork Technique: Elementary School

"If we can link operative thinking with contact in the social environment, we accomplish three vital things for the healthy development of the child. First, we help him grow intellectually by giving him occasions to which his knowing structures can be applied. Second, we introduce the child into social realities as an active participant. We give him to understand that, like physical reality, social realities are not simply given, but result from and require the intelligent contribution of individual persons. Finally, we can reasonably expect that as these children grow up, they will be prepared to work for the urgent concerns of society that will continue to emerge under the rapidly changing conditions of modern life."

Hans Furth, Piaget for Teachers, (Prentice-Hall, 1970)

The Incredible, Edible Apple

Goal: To publish an apple cookbook entitled "The Incredible, Edible Apple"

Purpose: Each student will interview someone in his or her immediate family for the purpose of getting an apple recipe and additional anecdotal information.

Pre-writing:

1. Bring in large, rosy apple. Discuss what foods come to mind and list all of these on the board. Encourage everyone to share ideas.
2. Share an apple treat such as apple bread with the students. Hand out a ditto of your recipe. Talk about how you got your recipe and memories you have about it.
3. Suggest collecting apple recipes and publishing them. Talk about who they could get recipes from. What are their favorite apple recipes?
4. Discuss how a recipe is written - usually ingredients are listed first, followed by mixing and baking instructions. Note how many people the recipe serves. Talk about abbreviations used.
5. Discuss possible interview questions to be used. Decide which questions would be best and have them typed on interview sheet. Examples of questions could be:

a. Who gave you the recipe or where did you get it?

b. How old were you when you first tasted this recipe?

c. What special memories do you have about eating or making this recipe?

d. Why do you like it?

e. Could you tell me the recipe so I could write it down?

6. Assign children to begin their interviews and collect recipes. Allow one full week (including weekend) to do assignment. As recipes are brought in, take time each day to discuss how the interview went and information about the recipe.

7. During the interview week, do activities that will focus and teach paragraphs. Use student work and teacher written paragraphs.

Writing:

1. Hand out a written statement of the assignment. It should include:

a. Title of recipe and copy of recipe.

b. A paragraph about your interview with the person who donated the recipe. Include all of the information received from the interview.

c. Due date.

2. Have students exchange papers and examine each other's work to see if the student:
   a. included all of the interview information.
   b. wrote sentences that clearly state their information.
   c. used paragraph form.
3. Have students revise and hand in. Comment on the clarity and completeness of their work. Share several and comment on sentences and word choices.

Publishing:

1. Discuss with students how booklet will be made. They could write or print their own recipes on ditto paper or have it typed. Let it be their decision.
2. Get committees organized for the following jobs:
   a. Will there be any illustrations? Who could work on those?
   b. What will the title and cover page be like?
   c. How about editing? Who could look over papers for spelling and punctuation?
   d. Who will help staple booklets together?
   e. Who will get copies of the cookbook? Who will deliver them?

Occupational Interviews

Goal: To publish a Career Guide for IMC

Purpose: To interview a person in the community

To write three paragraphs that include a job description, advantages and disadvantages of the job, and opinion on desirability of job.

Pre-writing:

1. Brainstorm with the students all the jobs they know of. List them on board.
2. Describe your job as a teacher. Discuss advantages/ disadvantages and why you like your job.
3. Ask the students to be ready to share about a job they think they'd like to do and their reasons for it.
4. Share the students' opinions the next day. Discuss how they could really find out about their job. (Use yellow pages of phone book)
5. Discuss interviewing as a means of getting information,
   a. What kinds of questions would you ask?
   b. Would an appointment be necessary?
   c. How would you express gratitude for the interview?
   d. How would you record your information?
6. Send note home to parents explaining the purpose and goal for the interviews. Ask for their support if transportation is needed and permission for child to leave building.

7. As a class do a practice interview on a school person such as principal, janitor, reading specialist.
8. Critique the class interview and revise questions if necessary.
9. Allow two days for students to arrange interviews by phone. Have them record their appointment times on Appointment Sheet so you know when students will be gone. Interviews can be held after school as well.
10. Have students conduct interviews. One week should be enough time. Each day take time to discuss how the completed interviews have gone.

Writing:

1. Make the writing assignment clear. Hand out a sheet stating they are to write three paragraphs that include:
   a. Description of the job
   b. Advantages/disadvantages of job
   c. Opinion of why student would/wouldn't like this job

   Their audience is classmates and Jr. High students. Due date: next day.
2. Next day, meet in groups of four to critique each individual's writing. Use hand-out with assignment information listed and space underneath each criterion for comments by group.
3. Provide time in class for revisions suggested by group. At this time have student look at spelling. Hand in rough draft to teacher.

4. Critique students' work for paragraph structure and mechanics. Hand back for final copy.

Publishing:

1. Collect final copies of each student's interview
2. Decide on format for Table of Contents
3. Discuss dedication of Career Guide
4. Decide on plan for cover. Ask for student(s) to make it. Laminate cover.
5. Assemble Career Guide and deliver to IMC for pocket and card catalogue number.

21

Long Term Fieldwork Project for Upper Elementary Schools

Goal: Publish a guide to the business district of a specific locality.

Purpose: To write an ad taking all aspects of the written ad into consideration.

Pre-writing:

1. Role play a new person coming into the community. (Teacher can take the role of the new person and ask questions about the town and where things are to be found.)
2. Break the students into groups and give them a webbing ditto where they have to answer such questions as where would someone new find food, doctors, household items, entertainment, schools, parks, police, etc.. The students should come up with as comprehensive a list as possible.
3. Suggest making a real directory of business available in area for newcommers.
4. Give students pages from an old yellow pages and have them note the common elements all ads have: address, time open, etc.
5. Break the area into geographical segments and assign groups to each of these locations.
6. Each group should compile a list of questions to use with each business they enter.
7. During class time go out and find out the answers to the

questions for each business in your area. They can arrange appointments outside of class if they wish.

Writing:

1. Have students write an ad for the business(s) they were assigned. (Ads must have address, time open, product etc. Ads may have art work, slogan, etc.)
2. Have them make a large model of their ad. It helps if each component of the ad is on a separate piece of paper. Spend time discussing with the students aspects of layout: proportion, slogans, design, size of print, type of print, etc.

Editing:

1. As a class, critique each person's ad. Spend a great deal of time and support on this.
2. If necessary redo the ad.
3. Take the ad back to the business for approval.
4. Share reactions to step 3.
5. If necessary redo steps 2 and 3.

Publishing:

1. Discuss organization for the yellow pages, including Cover, Index, Map, Dedication, Introduction (stating purpose) etc.
2. Assemble master book.
3. Take master book to PTA and local business for donations in order to get it published. (Know exact cost beforehand.)

Evaluation of Fieldwork Technique: Middle School

Career Search

Goal: To separate fact from opinion

To take notes and organize material

To investigate through interview technique

To learn more about careers of interest

Purpose: To write a student career guide

Pre-Writing:

1. Discuss in class, informally, students' future. Focus on:
   a. What do you hear people say about their jobs?
   b. What do you actually know as fact about different jobs?
   c. What careers appeal to you? Why?
2. Select a career topic to pursue. Form interest groups or work individually e.g., if several want to look into career as a mechanic, form a group and divide work.
3. Visit IMC for research material on careers or use guidance counselor's materials.
4. Choose from resource people one to interview. Teacher needs to do some advance contacting of community resource people prior to this e.g., career in mechanics group might divide up and interview the following:
   a. Car dealer
   b. Mechanic

c. Vocational education director

d. Auto mechanics teacher

5. Formulate questions for interview with students. See appendix for effective interview techniques.

6. Role play an interview in class, giving students a model to follow. Discuss note taking, using tape recorder.

7. Conduct actual interview. (If possible have principal's cooperation so you can use class time out of school.) Realizing limitations of bus schedules, etc. teacher must work this out with administrator. See section on "How to convince your principal."

Writing:

1. Discuss difference between fact and opinion, using hand-out with statements of fact, opinion, and taste. Elicit responses from students, and discuss differences.

2. Construct a model career report, showing how to separate facts from opinions, from their material (both research and interview) with students, on board or overhead.

3. Work with students during composing stage, helping them order their material into a logical summary.

4. Prepare articles in acceptable form, (remembering other students are the audience), for publication in the "Career Guide for Kids".

Editing:

1. Choose student editors (those more adept at mechanics, spelling, etc. can help others). Choose illustrators, lay-out staff, cover designers, etc.
2. Be available to students during this stage to offer lot of help.
3. Mimeograph pages, laminate cover and publish guide.
4. Distribute a copy to each student and watch them glow over their published work. Follow through and place copy in IMC and/or guidance office.

Investigation of People Dealing With Energy

Goal: To investigate the role of energy in the students community.
To learn the process of fieldwork.
To realize the complexities of the energy problem in the students' community.

Purpose: For the students to understand the energy situation in their community.

Pre-Writing:

1. Discuss with class ways individuals, families, businsses, etc. can conserve energy. Have kids bring in and collect information.
2. Use a filmstrip, movie, video tape on energy uses to introduce topic to students.
3. Discuss how energy costs affect people's lives.
4. Bring in daily newspapers, weekly magazines, nightly news. Check and discuss the amount of space devoted to topics on energy. NOTE: Teacher should be contacting resource people for future interviews.
5. Review/teach methods for a successful interview with students. Role-playing would be an excellent method. Discuss techniques for setting up an interview. See appendix for interviewing techniques.

6. Hand out list of possible resource people and divide students into teams of two or three. Have students contact resource people for interview times and confirm appointment. NOTE: You should confirm appointment.

   1. Possible resources could include: parents, farmers, businessmen/women, cab companies, bus companies, airlines, gas stations, utility companies, alternative energy source companies, state and local agencies, school administration, school custodian, other teachers, relatives, hospitals, elderly, etc.

   2. Materials: pencil and paper are the basic tools. However, if available, video tape machine, tape recorders, camera, etc.

Writing:

   1. Group should complete interview and transcribe a rough draft of interview.

   2. After editing by teacher or students, a final draft should be completed.

      a. Compile interviews into booklet or newspaper for distribution among class and resource people. Also send copies to community for distribution.

      b. Rewrite drafts into news reports for Energy Newspaper or TV News Program.

   3. Class should spend one period just enjoying the fruits of their labors.

Tuning In To Nature

Goal: To become sensitive to nature through the use of the five senses

To think and write creatively in an uninhibited setting

To expand the imagination by studying and describing an object of nature

To focus on original and special word choices

Purpose: To write free verse that will be read by peers and adults

Pre-Writing:

1. Introduce the idea of "Your Own Wild Place."[1] If possible, begin on a Friday so students have opportunities to visit their spot several times. Begin by asking students if they have a wild place that they visit by themselves. Maybe it's a pond, field, rock, or tree limb. Relate your own spot to get them started. (If you don't have one, now's the time to find one; we want you to become an active participant too.) If students don't have a special spot, ask them to choose one that is appealing, comfortable, and pleasing to them. The only requirement is that it be outside, away from people. Ask them to begin spending some time there. (15 minutes minimum suggested.) Then record what they experience, what they see, feel, etc. in their journals.

2. Next day in class share recordings with each other. Ask students to continue visiting their "wild place" the rest of the week. Emphasize really getting in touch with the spot. Keep recording in journals observations and feelings. What is it like to be alone? What special things does your spot have? Visit it at different times? What do you see early in the morning that you don't in the evening?
3. Decide on a spot you can use outside the school building: a park, field, school forest, nearby woods, even grassy parts of the playground if you can't leave the school grounds. (See earlier pages for how to talk to your principal about fieldwork.) Have students bring clipboard or notebook and pencil.
   a. Assemble group in a loose circle. Teacher's job is to fire questions, rather rapidly at first, to get students to respond in writing. Give enough descriptive words to initiate original responses. Use a 5 minute warm-up Ask questions to loosen students up to the feel of the air, sun, wind, etc.
   b. Ask each student to find an object of nature that appeals to him/her; pine cone, leaf, piece of bark, acorn, stone. Ask students to pick up their object and find a place to sit alone, but within hearing distance of teacher.

c. Emphasize the need for quiet to enable students to get in touch with their objects. Instruct students to use words and phrases, the more original the better, no sentences. This allows thoughts to flow from the senses to the mind to paper more quickly and freely.

d. Begin with TOUCH AND FEEL. e.g., Teacher: Let your fingers tell what you feel. Rub object against your cheek. Does it feel sandpapery, grating, velvety, mushy, damp, furry, prickly? What does it feel like? Compare. Crumpled tissue paper? Soggy marshmallows? Squishy as wet mud? Keep initiating questions to provoke written responses. Go through the rest of the senses with questions for seeing, listening, hearing, tasting, (do not eat; what would it taste like? Molasses, pizza, turpentine, lemon drops, cough medicine?) Take the object as a whole, the sum of all its parts, and describe it again. Compare it to something else.

e. Have students bring their writings with them to class the next day. If they can find the same object in their "wild place," encourage them to add more, or try the same thing with another object from their spot.

Writing:

In class have students share with a partner what they think are some of their best, original words, phrases or comparisons.

Have them star the favorites. Then have them use their idea of the object as a whole (abstract) as a first line. Carefully selecting from their best details and word choices, add these below. Using a model from your own writing, or a previous student's work, show on the board or overhead how free verse can look, no rhyme, careful attention to word choices and flowing lines. Keep thesauruses out, emphasizing precise word choices. Help students as much as possible in this composing stage. Also during the composing stage, inform students of their audience. There are many possibilities. One favorite which serves a two-fold purpose: Inform students that you are responsible for the November bulletin board in the main hall, and that the best pieces of writing will be selected to be displayed there. Emphasize that not only their peers, but other teachers and adults entering the building will be reading their writing.

Editing:

Have students work in pairs or small groups editing each others writing. Any mechanical problems can be handled at this time. Knowing the writings will be read by a wide audience is great motivation for careful editing. Let students know that pieces not selected this time may be used in the future, and that they will be displayed throughout the room. Be sure to follow through on the bulletin board.

Alternate plans:

1. Mimeograph all free verse pieces and make booklet for each student. Team with the art teacher and have students illustrate their objects and/or create an illustrated cover. Parents are often willing typists for such projects if an aid isn't available.
2. Nature writing can take place at any grade level with a little flexibility. Many other forms could be used instead of free verse.
3. Follow up on "Your Own Wild Place." Focus on solitude; high school age might use Walden Pond or Sand County Almanac as pre readings. Write from a different perspective, "ant's view," "raccoon's eyes." Write from general (overall view of spot) to specific (a special thing found there.) Compare and contrast "Wild Place" at different times of day and evening. Write a description of what it's like for someone who has never seen it. The possibilities are endless. Don't forget: You, the teacher, write too!

[1]See Pease, Jim. "Teaching Techniques in the Outdoors."

Additional Fieldwork Type Writing Activities

1. Find resource people who can give background on historical buildings and/or historical markers in your area. Any number of writing activities could follow.
2. Interview nursing home residents for "how it used to be"; write historical accounts, feature articles, stories, dramatizations.
3. Have students attend City Council meetings, take notes, write up minutes or prepare news story for newspaper.
4. Interview elementary students, high school students, parents on a specific topic or question. Publish results of survey in school newspaper or write up comparisons, etc.
5. Use parents as discussion source. Explore the differences between adult and teen culture. Write comparison paper, parody, etc.
6. Write a community history after conducting research and investigation. Bring older resident who has been a member of the community for a long time to school to share with class and act as a primary source.
7. Do conservation study, interviewing farmers, county agent, sportsmen, etc. Write up proposals and problems facing the area.
8. Through investigation and interviewing, do a "Person of the Year" from your community. Write feature articles and publish in local paper.

9. Team with science staff and develop an arboretum, school forest, or even plant trees on school property. Write up plans, proposals, results, etc.

These are only a few suggestions to start you thinking about the myriad of opportunities your own community offers. The list could be endless, but we trust we have planted the seed to more fieldwork/writing activities that you, the creative teacher, can initiate Remember when planning fieldwork activities to include other content area teachers as often as feasible. Every teacher is a writing teacher; help others become involved.

Fieldwork Technique: High School

Goal: Produce an informal "Guide For Incoming Freshmen" written by freshmen to distribute to 8th graders

Purpose: To give students a chance to:

-- write for a specific audience

-- take responsibility for helping other students achieve success in high school

-- learn interview techniques

-- think critically about their own experiences

Strategies:

1. Using a literary model like William Saroyan's "First Day of School" lead the class in a discussion of what it's like to be in a new school situation. Ask students to share their own experiences as freshmen at their high school.
2. Brainstorm and decide on two or more questions students could ask people about their freshmen experiences(e.g., "Tell me one surprising thing that happened to you in your first week of high school," or "If you were to give incoming freshmen one piece of advice, what would it be?")
3. Go over simple interview techniques with students and decide on committees to work on the publication "Guide For Incoming Freshmen" (possible committees might include: layout, editing, production, distribution)

4. Conduct and write up interviews. Use small group "workshops" to evaluate the interviews. Have the class decide on the format for the "Guide".
5. Begin committee work--including writing extra sections, introduction, maps of the school, etc.
6. Distribute the publication to middle schools.

Goal: Prepare a Local Food Consumers Guide (and start your own food cooperative . . .?) (adapted from an idea presented in Finding Community, James Freel Associates, 1971)

Purpose: Get students to:

-- do original first hand research

-- think critically about issues that concern their own personal health and write about these issues

-- examine how well people's needs are being met in their community and share that evaluation with local consumers

Strategies:

1. Read and discuss newspaper articles about food labeling, cost, and nutritional value (e.g. William Selover's "Do the Poor Pay More For Food")
2. Discuss developing a survey to use in comparing local stores -- brainstorm and finalize survey items:
   a. Comparison of the prices of basic food items like:
      bread, 1 lb. 8 oz. loaf, white
      orange juice, 1 can, frozen, 6 oz.
      peanut butter, 1 jar, 1 lb. 12 oz.
      eggs, 1 doz. medium
      potatoes, 3 lbs.
      tomato soup, 10 3/4 oz.
      ground beef, 1 lb.

b. Questions about each store's marketing techniques:

Is there a good supply of bargain items?

Do vegetables appear fresh?

Is the meat display case lit by a special red light that makes the meat appear fresher?

Does the store post unit prices?

Does the store list a comparison of nutritional values in different brands of a product?

Does the store offer trading stamps?

Does the store have games or other giveaways?

c. A section on each store's services to the community:

Does the store offer a check cashing service?

Accept food stamps?

Provide free delivery?

Have a community bulletin board?

Use a system for recycling bottles and aluminum cans?

Demonstrate equal employment practices?

3. Decide which stores to survey and divide the stores among members of the class.
4. Conduct the survey and compile the results.
5. Begin discussing the format and content of your Local Food Co sumer's Guide. Decide on articles and who will be responsible for editing, layout, production, typing and distribution. Talk about who the guide should be for.

6. Students may want to refer to other sources of information written for consumers: Consumer Reports, government publications.
7. One committee of students may want to explore "alternative" food services -- cooperatives, warehouse food stores, etc.
8. Write up articles and use small group "workshops" to evaluate and edit them.
9. Production, layout committee work.
10. Distribute final guide to community.

Goal: To write a regional/cultural history of your community

Purpose: Building an Awareness of your regional/cultural heritage

Time Length: 1 Semester

1. Introduce students to the concept of regional or cultural influences through literary models covering different regional cultural topics (e.g., urban - Studs Terkel's Division Street U.S.A.; rural - Willa Cather, Grapes of Wrath, Giants in the Earth; minorities - Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee; Native Son).
2. Class discusses the reading and compares situations written about with their own situations.
3. Speakers from the community (reporters, librarians, historians) are brought into class to give students advice on information gathering.
4. On the basis of the speakers and the discussions of the literary models, the students derive a questionnaire to be used to interview fellow students with the idea that the data elicited will be used to arrive at the general student impression of what the community is.
5. The class conducts the interviews on their own time.
6. Class evaluates the data as a group and forms a description of the students' perception of their community.
7. The class is divided into 3 groups responsible for studying community's past, present, and future.

8. Each group derives its own questionnaire, this time focusing upon the subjective aspects of the community while still including the objective.

9. Each group practices interviewing technique by role-playing among themselves and evaluating the results.

10. A representative of each group interviews an adult visitor to the class with their newly-developed questionnaire, and results are critiqued by the class. (If a video tape recorder is available, it would come in handy at this point.)

11. The groups are sent into the field to interview as follows:

    a. "Past" group: older residents of the community; local historians

    b. "Present" group: parents; neighbors

    c. "Future" group: mayor; city planner; chamber of commerce

    (The gathering of photographs could be useful at this stage, also.)

12. The groups transcribe the interviews.

13. The class gathers again as a large group and is then subdivided into the following groups: editors, proof-readers, lay-out, production, and circulation.

"Excursions out of the classroom should be an ordinary part of the school day, not something special that happens a few times during the year. The purpose should be to familiarize the school child with his immediate social and physical environment."

Hans Furth, Piaget for Teachers
(Prentice Hall, 1970) p. 133

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Appendix: Interview Techniques

1. Set up interview in person. This allows the people to realize you are serious.
2. Ask questions naturally. Be familar with your material.
3. Be sure of your equipment. Check tape recorder or pen to make sure that it works!
4. Find out as much as possible about subject before you go out on the interview.
5. Don't overwhelm person with equipment in first moments of interview. Ease into the use of the recorder. If necessary, don't even start it up.
6. Bring clipboard and paper to take notes. Make notes or diagrams on surroundings.
7. Ask permission to tape interview and take photos.
8. Don't stick to notes. Use your own curiosity.
9. Let person talk about what he/she wants.
10. Use publication release slips. (These provide written permission for publication)
11. Repay people with kindness for taking time to talk.

Research shows that small groups of two or three do well in interview situations. This allows the tasks to be divided, so one can manage tape recorder or take notes, someone can take photographs, and one leads the interview. However, everyone asks questions!

Sample Interview Questions

1. What were times like when you were a child?

   -- How did you and your family live?

   -- Were times better, or worse. Why?

   -- What is your most vivid memory of a subject, idea, etc.

2. What type of things did you do as a child/components of job or business?

   -- What do you like most about job, as a child, etc.

3. How did your parents treat you? How do your supervisor/ customers treat you?

   -- What did they do that you remember best?

   -- What was most enjoyable about your youth/occupation?

4. What advice or training has served you best?

   -- What are some examples?

   -- How have you profited from them?

   -- What is your advice on this matter?

5. What was it like when you first went out on your own?

   -- Were times hard or good?

   -- Did you enjoy it and why?

6. How do you feel about living where you do?

   -- Explain your reasons?

   -- What do you like best about where you live? Why?

7. How do you feel about life in general today?

   -- How different is it than ____ years ago?

   -- Discuss your feelings about this.

8. What do you think of the direction of our country is going today?

   -- Is America being run well or badly?

9. What do you feel is the most valuable possession you have ever had? (Something you could not have done without) Why?

10. If you could go back and live your life over, what would you change?

11. How do you feel about:

   -- money

   -- friendship

   -- honesty

   -- success

   -- failure

12. What do you consider to be faults in people?

13. What advice could you give others to help them?

The above questions are only meant to be a model interview. You will have to modify and adapt your questions to the interview situation. The questions are taken from Foxfire's Sample Personality Questions, found in You And Aunt Arie.

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